

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Scientists name new species of dinosaur after Canadian icon

Namesake museum identifies new dinosaur species from Alberta

July 17, 2017

WEMBLEY, ALBERTA – Scientists from the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) have identified and named a new species of dinosaur in honour of renowned Canadian palaeontologist Dr. Philip J. Currie. *Albertavenator curriei*, meaning “Currie’s Alberta hunter,” stalked Alberta, Canada, about 71 million years ago in what is now the famous Red Deer River Valley. The find recognizes Currie for his decades of work on predatory dinosaurs of Alberta. Research on the new species is published July 17 in the *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences*.

Palaeontologists initially thought that the bones of *Albertavenator* belonged to its close relative *Troodon*, which lived around 76-million-years-ago — five million years before *Albertavenator*. Both dinosaurs walked on two legs, were covered in feathers, and were about the size of a person. New comparisons of bones forming the top of the head reveal that *Albertavenator* had a distinctively shorter and more robust skull than *Troodon*, its famously brainy relative.

“The delicate bones of these small feathered dinosaurs are very rare. We were lucky to have a critical piece of the skull that allowed us to distinguish *Albertavenator* as a new species.” said Dr. David Evans, Temerty Chair and Senior Curator of Vertebrate Palaeontology at the Royal Ontario Museum, and leader of the project. “We hope to find a more complete skeleton of *Albertavenator* in the future, as this would tell us so much more about this fascinating animal.”

Identifying new species from fragmentary fossils is a challenge. Complicating matters of this new find are the hundreds of isolated teeth that have been found in Alberta and previously attributed to *Troodon*. Teeth from a jaw that likely pertains to *Albertavenator* appear very similar to the teeth of *Troodon*, making them unusable for distinguishing between the two species.

“This discovery really highlights the importance of finding and examining skeletal material from these rare dinosaurs,” concluded Derek Larson, co-author on the study and Assistant Curator of the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum.



The identification of a new species of troodontid in the Late Cretaceous of North America indicates that small dinosaur diversity in the latest Cretaceous of North America is likely underestimated due to the difficulty of identifying species from fragmentary fossils.

“It was only through our detailed anatomical and statistical comparisons of the skull bones that we were able to distinguish between *Albertavenator* and *Troodon*,” said Thomas Cullen, a Ph.D. student of Evans at the University of Toronto and co-author of the study.

The bones of *Albertavenator* were found in the badlands surrounding the Royal Tyrrell Museum, which Dr. Currie played a key role in establishing in the early 1980s. The rocks around the museum are the same age as some of the most fossiliferous rocks in the area of the newly erected Philip J. Currie Museum, also named in Dr. Currie’s honour. Dr. Currie has had several dinosaurs named after him, and this is the second one from Alberta, where he has made his biggest impact.

The fossils of *Albertavenator* studied by Evans and his team are housed in the collections of the Royal Tyrrell Museum. This is another example of a new species of dinosaur being discovered by re-examining museum research collections, which continually add to our understanding of the evolution of life on Earth. This study suggests that more detailed studies of fragmentary fossils may reveal additional, currently unrecognized, species.

Full Reference:

Evans, D.C., Cullen, T.M., Larson, D.W., and Rego, A. “A new species of troodontid theropod (Dinosauria: Maniraptora) from the Horseshoe Canyon Formation (Maastrichtian) of Alberta, Canada.” *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences*

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About the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum

The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum is an award winning institution for experiential learning dedicated to Alberta's palaeontological heritage through research, collection, preservation, exhibition, public programming, publications, and innovative outreach. Canada's newest world-class museum features the latest interactive technology and exhibit methods, state-of-the-art lab, and sustainable architecture. Visit/Donate/Support the museum and shop for unique merchandise at www.dinomuseum.ca.

About the ROM

Opened in 1914, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) showcases art, culture, and nature from around the globe and across the ages. One of North America's most renowned cultural institutions, Canada's largest museum is home to a world-class collection of more than six million objects and specimens, featured in 40 gallery and exhibition spaces. As the country's preeminent field research institute and an international leader in new and original findings in biodiversity, palaeontology, earth sciences, the visual arts, material culture and archaeology, the ROM plays a vital role in advancing our global understanding of the artistic, cultural and natural world. The Renaissance ROM expansion project (2007) merged the iconic architectural heritage of the original building with the Studio Daniel Libeskind-designed Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. A distinctive new symbol of Toronto for the 21st century, the Crystal marked the beginning of a new era for the ROM as the country's premier cultural and social destination.

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